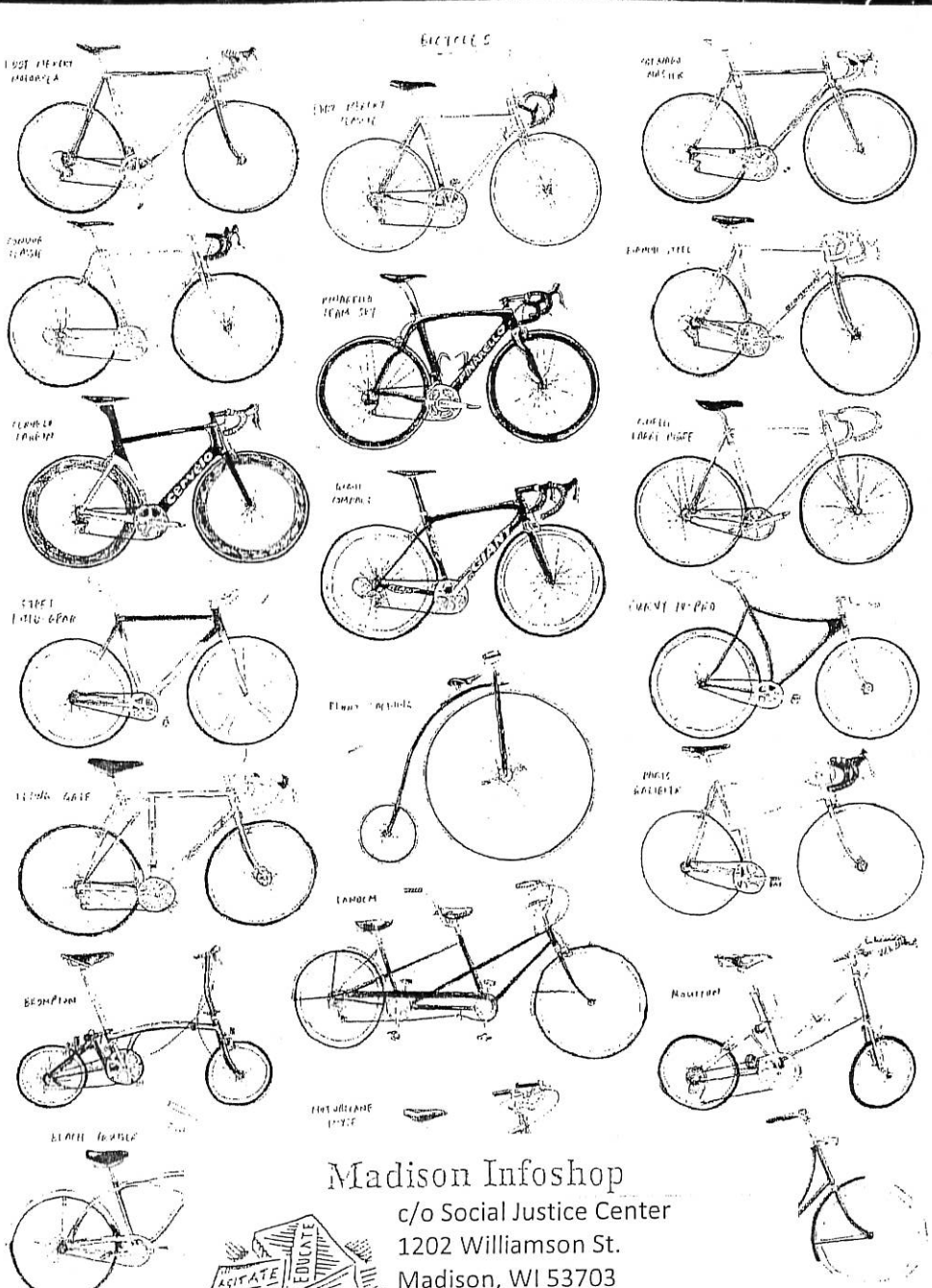
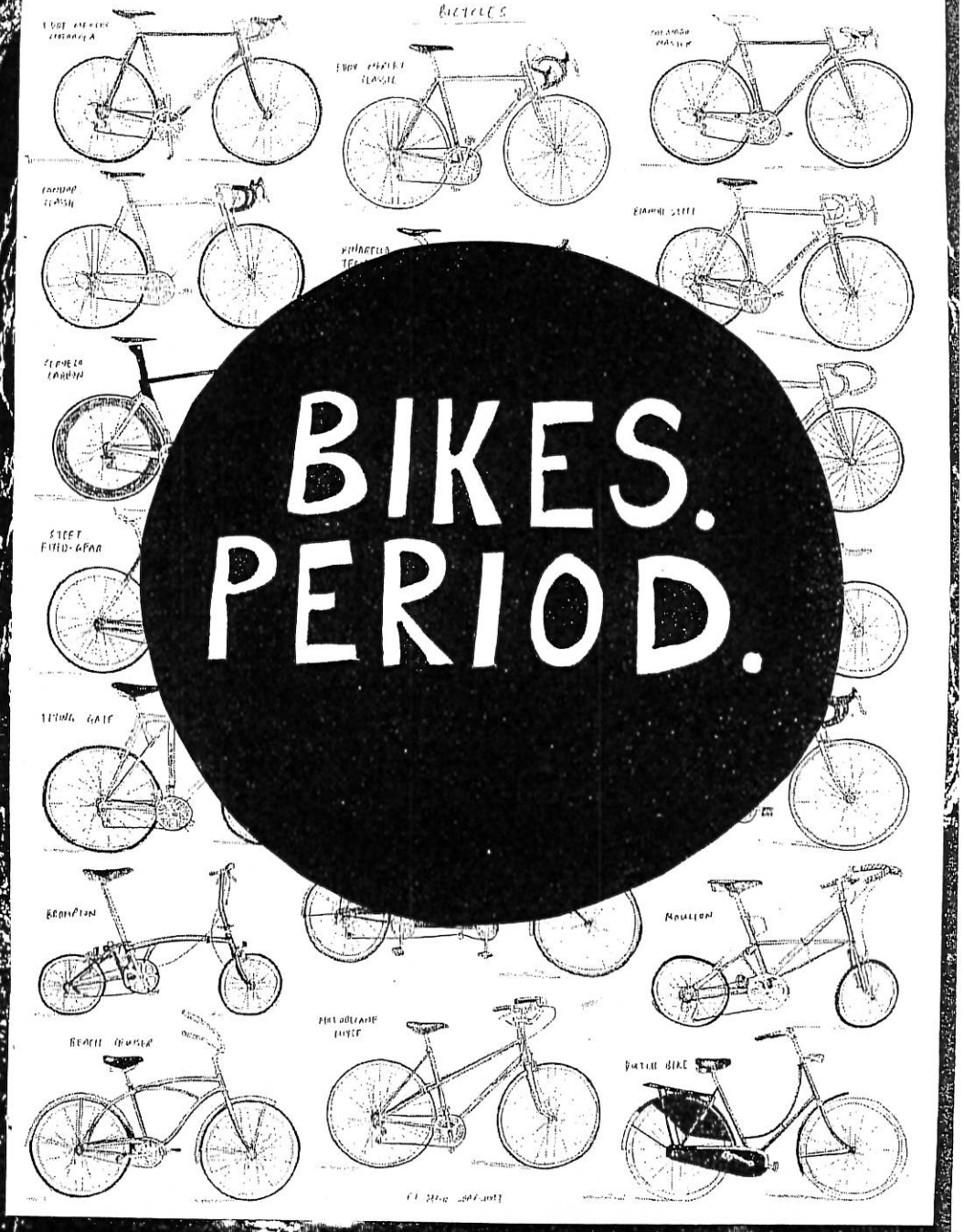


Madison Infoshop
c/o Social Justice Center
1202 Williamson St.
Madison, WI 53703
madisoninfoshop@gmail.com
www.madinfoshop.wordpress.com



BIKES. PERIOD.

A ZINE ABOUT BICYCLES AND MENSTRUATION

INTRODUCTION

If you've gotten to know me at all, beyond the shy, awkward stage I tend to invoke upon the first few meetings, then you know that I'm rather forthright about human biology. I'm not ashamed to talk about sex, poop, pee, infections, ear wax, bad breath, farts, and yes, menstruation. Unfortunately, much of society disagrees; these topics should be left private, certainly not discussed in open, public forums! As I see it, this repression has damaged many individuals' self-confidence, and in the worst cases, has led to poor hygiene, infection, and even death. Why not explore and celebrate the wonders of the human body, learn from each other, and revel in our most embarrassing moments together, to ease self-doubt and connect in community?

I work at a bike shop. I have spoken with many customers asking about awkward topics such as butt chafing, scrunched vulvas, and numb testicles. Often times, these conversations are spoken in hushed voices, eyes darting left and right to make sure other customers are not nearby. Sometimes, customers are unabashed by the topic, and they practically yell across the room about their swollen taints. In every case, I find it comforting that strangers are willing to discuss with me their more private stories, toward the goal of improved comfort while cycling. A little pain or a little blood ain't stopping these folks from enjoying the ride!

This is what's led me on my latest mission: collecting stories about bicycling and menstruation. Periods are taboo to discuss in most spaces, especially in the male-dominated bicycling world. I hope these stories make you smile, bring a sense of community, and sing solidarity among ovulating cyclists and their kin.

♥ SARAHTOPS

November 1st, 2014

Special Thanks go to **Wheelwomen Switchboard** and **GladRags** for amplifying my call-out for story submissions, and to the rad ladies who contributed to BIKES.PERIOD. Keep on riding the crimson wave, my friends! (...Or not, if you're post-menopausal. Lucky!)

RESOURCES

for your Bloody Bike Interests:

Wheelwomen Switchboard: **wheelwomen.switchboardhq.com**

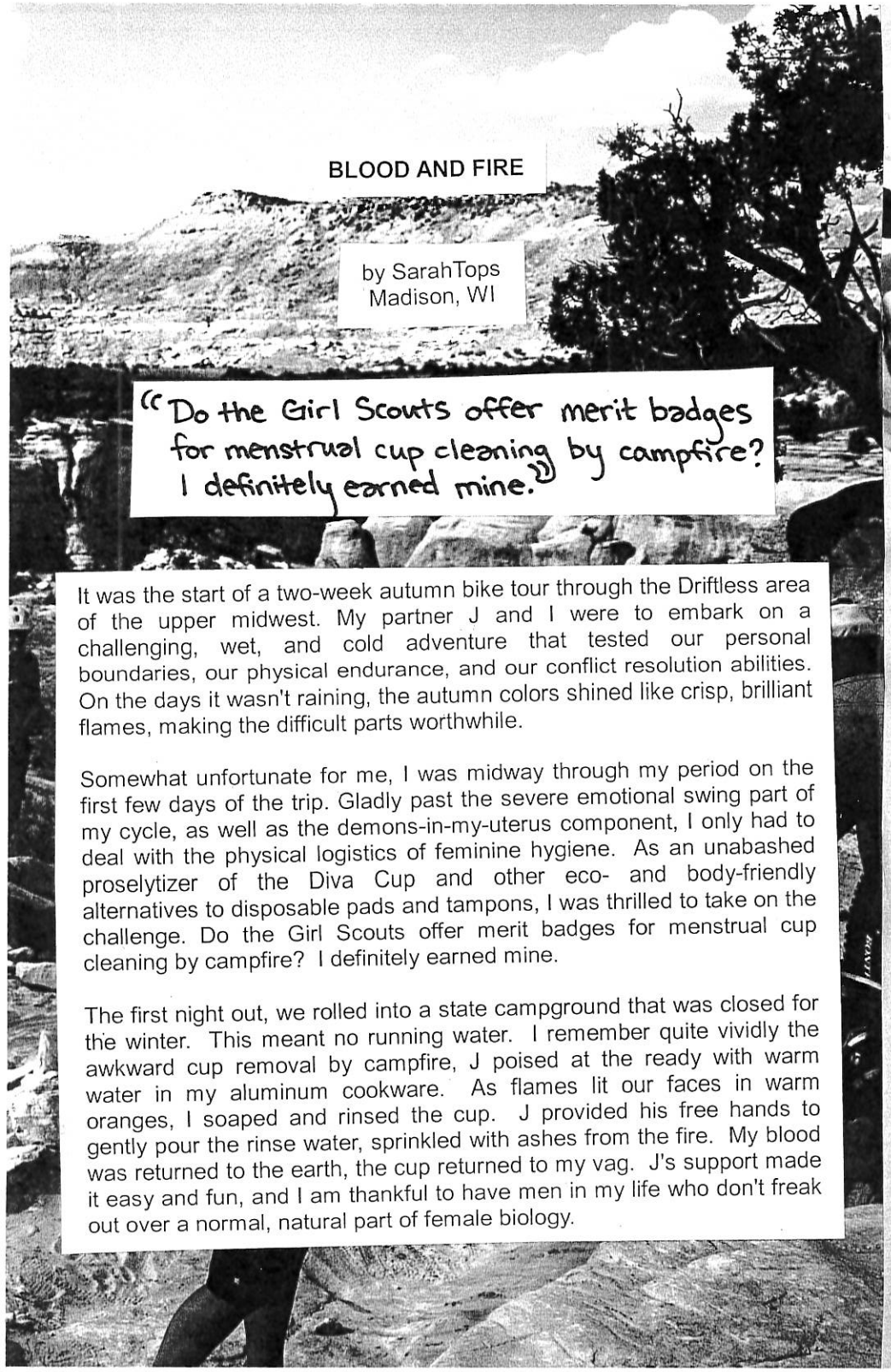
GladRags: **gladrags.com**

Party in my Pants: **partypantspads.com**

Life on Two Wheels (zine contributor!): **josiebikelife.blogspot.com**

Sustainable Cycles: **sustainablecycles.wordpress.com**

Elly Blue Publishing: **takingthelane.com**



BLOOD AND FIRE

by SarahTops
Madison, WI

"Do the Girl Scouts offer merit badges for menstrual cup cleaning by campfire? I definitely earned mine."

It was the start of a two-week autumn bike tour through the Driftless area of the upper midwest. My partner J and I were to embark on a challenging, wet, and cold adventure that tested our personal boundaries, our physical endurance, and our conflict resolution abilities. On the days it wasn't raining, the autumn colors shined like crisp, brilliant flames, making the difficult parts worthwhile.

Somewhat unfortunate for me, I was midway through my period on the first few days of the trip. Gladly past the severe emotional swing part of my cycle, as well as the demons-in-my-uterus component, I only had to deal with the physical logistics of feminine hygiene. As an unabashed proselytizer of the Diva Cup and other eco- and body-friendly alternatives to disposable pads and tampons, I was thrilled to take on the challenge. Do the Girl Scouts offer merit badges for menstrual cup cleaning by campfire? I definitely earned mine.

The first night out, we rolled into a state campground that was closed for the winter. This meant no running water. I remember quite vividly the awkward cup removal by campfire, J poised at the ready with warm water in my aluminum cookware. As flames lit our faces in warm oranges, I soaped and rinsed the cup. J provided his free hands to gently pour the rinse water, sprinkled with ashes from the fire. My blood was returned to the earth, the cup returned to my vag. J's support made it easy and fun, and I am thankful to have men in my life who don't freak out over a normal, natural part of female biology.

SURVIVAL INSTINCTS

by Tara Van Rose
Madison, WI

"... my bike and my period give me the power to survive, to fight."

I read something on the internet that said, "Women who exercise while on their periods are the ones who will survive the apocalypse." It was on the internet so it must be true, but I couldn't agree more. I never feel more powerful than when I'm biking while on my period. I think about it every time I get on my bike. When instead of curling up into a tiny ball, I get up and get moving; that's my survival instincts kicking in.

I often ponder how I'd react to a zombie attack or some other apocalyptic occurrence. Would I grab my dog and a blanket and hide in the closet? Or would I put on my cowboy boots, grab a bow and arrow (my weapon of choice for the apocalypse) and stand up to fight? When I untie myself from the cramped knot I'm in on my bed, check my Diva Cup, put on my bike gear, and head out the door, I feel the fighter in me. I feel the survivor in me. I feel the freedom that my bike and my period give me. Riding my bike and getting my period is when I feel complete ownership over my body. I ride and smile at another month that my body belongs to me. The wave of relief that comes over me when I get my period each month is intense. I sigh and feel the tension in my body release. I may even fist bump the air, occasionally.

Despite my clockwork and religious obedience to the pill, I still hold onto my greatest fear: getting pregnant. It's an overwhelming fear that I can't shake, one that grows more intense each time there is legislation created to restrict reproductive freedom. I fear it all month, but I fear it most in the days leading up to getting my period. Despite the debilitating cramps that precede it, they are never enough to stifle the hypochondria, and I fear it until the moment I see blood. Relief; like finally getting to the top of that hill and being able to coast down it. I feel that freedom when I am soaring on my bike, and I am never more powerful and in control than in that moment.

My bike gives me freedom. My period gives me freedom. I ride and I think about how I can take on anything: cramps, that steep hill, anti-choicers, or that asshole catcalling as I bike by. Whether it's just another day in control of my own body and my own choices, or whether it's fighting a zombie apocalypse, my bike and my period give me the power to survive, to fight.

A RITE OF PASSAGE

by Josie S.
Decorah, IA

My story starts out very simply. I was getting ready to go out mountain biking with a friend of mine, not at all suspecting that I would get my period that day. Further proof of this: I wore light blue/teal baggy shorts over my padded shorts.

I met Kristin at the bike shop, and we went off to hit the mountain bike trails. I rode the first trail without any "*sense*" of what was going to happen, but hitting a trail called North 40, I felt the "*gush*."

"*Uh oh.*" Kristin might've asked if I needed to go back home or something, but I'm pretty sure I said, "*Nah. I'll be fine. It shouldn't be too heavy yet.*" Of course I was not prepared with any tampons or anything as a backup. I hoped that my padded shorts would prevent any mishaps, but I learned that they do have a limit.

Kristin and I rode the trails for about 3-some hours, eventually getting to the point where our snacks weren't keeping us sated anymore, and we needed "real" food. We had headed back to do a couple loops through IPT; after we came back out to the fire road, I had this feeling to "look down."

Diluted red. *Oh crap!* I had never experienced a "*bleed out*" before, let alone in front of someone. Yeah, I felt a little sheepish at that moment. "*Well, I guess that's what Camelbaks are for!*" I stripped my baggies off and shoved them into the pocket. Apparently I was having a heavier start to my period than I thought I would (the joys of an IUD-Paragard).

It felt like I experienced a rite of passage as a woman mountain biker, so I might as well own it.

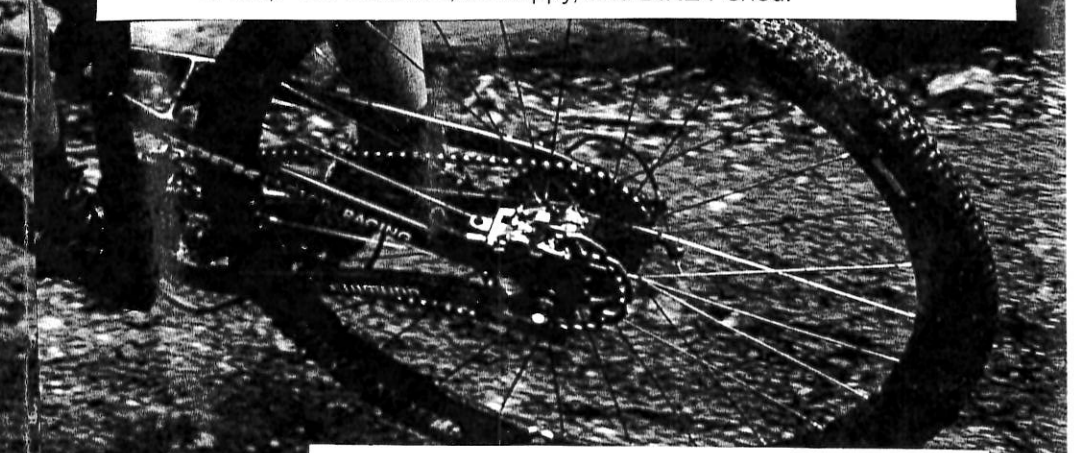
We rode back to my house so I could change and swap out padded shorts and baggies (*we were going to go out riding a little later with my boyfriend*), and we hit up the local co-op for lunch. This time I made sure I was prepared!

I look it as a positive experience and, yes, was thankful that Kristin was the only one to actually witness it. When I was younger I would've been mortified, but this day I was not worried about it at all; in fact, I embraced it. I was too focused on doing something that I loved to care, though I was happy when my shorts washed out and were stain-free!

THE RED RIDER

by BikerBits
Seattle, WA

Gotta say that biking and periods are not the greatest companions. Some shorter rides to the grocery store or something: really no biggie. But the long rides like bike-camping for two nights and three days can be a bummer. OR how about riding in your very first Cyclocross race on the HEAVIEST flow day? ...Been there, yikes! You might think the extra padding in your crotch would be nice for a bike ride: NOPE. The bulky pads are mega sweat collectors and are not a welcomed addition to the already tiny area for sitting. But what are we supposed to do, stay home? NO WAY! With just a little bit of planning you will be out on your bike with your best Auntie Flow. Carry an extra bottle of water, try a Diva Cup, bring extra pads, pack a little plastic garbage baggie, and try to plan your bike ride near public restrooms (grocery stores, coffee shops, gas stations, etc.). Get out there, be happy, and BIKE Period!



"With just a little bit of planning, you will be out on your bike with your best Auntie Flow."

PARTY IN MY PANTS, FUN BETWEEN MY LEGS

by SarahTops
Madison, WI

I had come to love my Diva Cup. It took me a few cycles to really get the hang of it—awkward crouches by toilet bowls and bright red spills on the tiled floor. But when my menstrual cup was deployed, it was like magic, a magic of comfort, of ability, of "normalcy." My Diva relieved all pains associated with biking on crunched-up pads and tampon-dryness-turned-yeast-infections that plagued me previously. It was heaven.

So when I was diagnosed earlier this year with a mysterious infection preventing me from wearing my menstrual cup for a cycle, I was devastated! As an avid bike commuter who spends a lot of time in the saddle, I was not looking forward to the return to cloth pads. Years ago, I had made my own pads using terrycloth sewed within soft flannel, which I attached to the pantyline with safety pins. I found them quite bulky when cycling, which helped push me to find alternatives. This time, however, I was making more money and decided to try out a "professionally" made product with easy snap-on installation. I had learned of a Wisconsin-based cloth pad company named Party in My Pants. With a name like that, how could I resist?

I cycled to my favorite cooperative pharmacy to explore my options. Party in My Pants had some of the most adorable prints to lift the spirits during this dire time. I bought a few forest-animal and cosmos-sky printed pads in different sizes and flows, hoping they would work. I was absolutely thrilled when they turned out to be more than just adorable. They were soft, thin, and easy to bike in, and their nylon backing prevented leakage. Although the cloth pads didn't allow 100% confidence and were a bit of a pain to change and clean multiple times a day, I was very impressed. I bought a few more to add to my supply. Perhaps my sewing skills need leveling-up, but my homemade pads were really lacking compared to Party in My Pants'. Unfortunately, their magic cannot compare to the Awesome Power of the DivaCup, so my cloth pads have retreated to the back of my underwear drawer, awaiting their next time to shine.

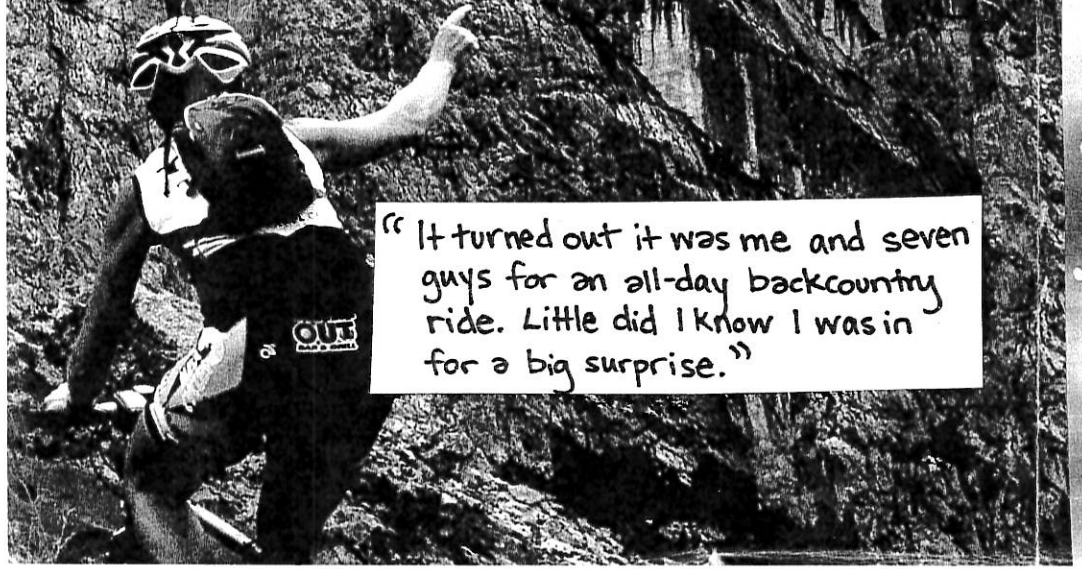
"...when my menstrual cup was deployed, it was like magic, a magic of comfort, of ability, of 'normalcy.'"

"It felt like I experienced a rite of passage as a woman mountain biker, so I might as well own it."

BACKCOUNTRY SURPRISE

by Penny S.
Spokane, WA

Here is my little tale. I'm 53 and am finally coming to the end of over ten years of highly unpredictable perimenopause and fibroid-related incidents. I am an enthusiastic, passionate mountain biker. I've always been very active in online biking communities. I went to a gathering of mountain bikers in central Idaho, an event we put together online. It turned out that it was me and seven guys for an all-day backcountry ride. Little did I know that I was in for a big surprise on this ride. Sixteen miles of backcountry singletrack, and, no, I was not prepared for an incident of instant heavy flow, the first of many to follow in the years after. So how to do you deal with a heavy flow surprise in the backcountry when you are with seven guys you don't know very well, and you aren't prepared? Thank goodness for two things: a wad of TP in my pack and black shorts. I was not about to explain my situation to my crew; I just dealt with it. It was not the most comfortable mountain bike ride ever, I can tell you that. I learned my lesson: every pack, every Camelback, every glovebox, every first-aid kit since then has a stash of tampons and/or pads. Never again! Thank goodness I'm done with all that now, but that day stands out vividly as a case of not being prepared.



"It turned out it was me and seven guys for an all-day backcountry ride. Little did I know I was in for a big surprise."

A CENTURY TO REMEMBER

by BikerBits
Seattle, WA

We signed up for a summer (metric) century ride, AWESOME! Got my period, NOT awesome. Packing for our 60-mile day-trip, we loaded with goo packs, repair kits, water bottles, and a few extra tampons. The ride was supported with bagel stops and porta-potties. Beautiful day of riding, except the first pit stop was not for a few hours. When we got there, we grabbed some bagels, easy. Waiting in the forever long line to the porta-potty, not easy. Where was I supposed to wash my hands before AND after I changed my tampon???? We pedaled on until I found a big patch of forest and told my male bike buddies to ride ahead for a moment. I scrambled into the woods with my water bottle, dug a little hole in dirt to bury my belongings, and prayed that NO-ONE stumbled into my makeshift bathroom. The ride was great, rewarding, and my first Bike Period.

"Where was I supposed to wash my hands... ????"